

## “Essentials” of Amish Life

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**Purpose:** To gain a deeper understanding and knowledge of the values and lifestyles of a group of people “frozen in time”.

**Geography Elements/Standards Addressed:** This lesson applies to all six Essential Elements of Geography (as adapted in statements below), plus the Inquiry Skills as tools for deeper understanding of the Elements.

#1 -- *World in Spatial Terms:* Geographic and mental maps assist in understanding patterns that reflect and guide the daily lives of the Amish.

#2 -- *Places and Regions:* The Amish continue to maintain their identity with and the way of life of their foreparents as they move to different regions of the world.

#3 and 4 -- *Human and Physical Systems:* The Amish have migrated to regions where they can practice an agrarian way of life in a close community of family and believers.

#5 -- *Environment and Society:* The Amish value and use Earth’s resources as if they are borrowing from their children’s future.

#6 -- *Uses of Geography:* The Amish practice their past while living in the present and planning for the future.

This lesson follows the ***Inquiry Skills of Geography:** asking questions, acquiring information, organizing information, analyzing information and answering questions.*

**Grade Levels:** This activity is suggested for grades 4-8

**Timeframe:** This activity is suggested for four fifty-minute sessions (segments can be meshed or used independently).

### Materials Required:

- chart paper and markers for brainstorming
- t-charts (examples provided)
- Amish photographs and artifacts
- Amish-Grams (provided)
- peanut brittle recipe (provided)

**Objectives:** Upon completion of the lesson, the students will have...

1. examined current knowledge and stereotypes about the Amish way of life,
2. researched, organized, and analyzed data using cognitive maps (t-charts) of information based on Geographic Elements,
3. applied knowledge and compared their lifestyles with that of the Amish, and
4. made predictions about the Amish of the future.

### Procedures:

#### 1) *Introduction: Asking Questions*

- a) Stimulate thinking, pre-assess information, and investigate stereotypes by distributing photographs and Amish artifacts for small groups to closely “read” and to formulate statements

about Amish lifestyles. On large charts, conduct a brainstorm activity with each student dictating at least one statement about the Amish ascertained from background information, photos, and artifacts. Record all responses, encourage guessing, and allow no editing of statements at this point.

- b) Continue with consensus-building by having students express their opinions with hand signals for each statement which applies to Amish in general. Explain the Amish tend to be more similar than most cultures; as a result, they are often stereotyped. To determine the current thinking and knowledge of the class, in the margin of the brainstorm chart, code majority responses by each statement as follows: thumbs up with a “K” for “I know it’s true and can prove it”; thumbs down with “F” for “False of most Amish”; and hands spread in horizontal position with “T” for “I think it is true, but I am not sure”. Display the chart for continued reference, proof, corrections, and additions during remaining activities. Add another chart for questions the class wishes to address.

2) *Data Development: **Acquiring and Organizing Data***

- a) Divide groups by **Geography Essentials #2** (Place and Regions); **#3 and 4** (Physical and Human Systems); **and #5** (Environment and Society). Duplicate across large “t-charts” the Essentials statements listed at the beginning of the plan. Each group then records on the left the facts which “agree” with and support its assignment statement and facts which do not support on the right (see example). Provide groups with the Amish-Grams and/or other resources to locate and record facts. Additional “t-charts” may be made by clustering questions which the students wish to research.
- b) Encourage extension of resources through interviews with Amish and friends, World-Wide Web use, maps, tables, graphs, books, and current films and videos.

3) *Extension and Enrichment: **Applying Information***

- a) Prepare to share information with group role-plays and displays of charts, notes, timelines, and maps to illustrate each of the Essentials. Rehearse within groups before sharing with the class.
- b) As an enrichment activity, provide students with a microwave recipe. Challenge them to convert the recipe for an Amish kitchen and family considering details of roles, utensils, equipment, sources of energy and ingredients, and time involved.
- c) If time permits, make microwave candy and compare quality and taste with purchased Amish peanut brittle.

4) *Assessment: **Answering Questions and Assessing Information***

- a) Cooperatively and constructively critique each of the presentations above with rubrics related to clarity and breadth of information, involvement of group,...
- b) Revisit the original brainstormed chart to correct statements, add new statements, answer listed questions, and pose additional questions.
- c) For a written assessment, ask each student to explain and/or illustrate one of more of the Geography Essentials as they apply to the life of an Amish group of the future. Use guiding questions: How and why might they change? What will remain constant in their beliefs and lifestyles? Why? Which of their customs do you most respect? Which do you wish would be adopted universally? Explain your reasons for both.

\* The Amish-Gram has been organized around 12 universal cultural themes for the Center for Cultural Resources located at Indiana University Southeast. The teacher has the authors’ permission to make revisions as needed.